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January 9, 2004

To: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman
Supervisor Gloria Molina
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Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: David E. Janssen
Chief Administrative Officer

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**EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO
ADDRESS THE IMPENDING CRISIS IN EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
(ITEM NO. 38, AGENDA OF JANUARY 13, 2004)**

Item No. 38 on the January 13, 2004 Agenda is a report from the Emergency Medical Services Commission (EMSC) on the November 13, 2003 public hearing hosted by the Commission to examine the impending crisis in emergency medical services in Los Angeles County. As a result of the hearing, the Commission developed seven recommendations, three of which address either a proposed State ballot measure or legislative issues and are the focus of this memo. The recommendations are to support 1) the State ballot initiative sponsored by the Coalition to Preserve Emergency Care, 2) the ongoing State emergency services appropriation to protect funding for physician call panels, and 3) legislation to develop additional nursing programs and to expand existing programs to educate more nurses in the State of California.

Support "The 911 Emergency and Trauma Care Act"

The State ballot initiative sponsored by the Coalition to Preserve Emergency Care, known as "the 911 Emergency and Trauma Care Act," would increase the surcharge on telephone calls made within California to fund 911 emergency dispatch, emergency rooms, trauma centers and emergency doctors. The measure is in circulation until January 12, 2004, and has yet to qualify for the November ballot. If enacted, the initiative would be effective January 1, 2005. Among the sponsors of the measure are the California Healthcare Association, the California Medical Association, the California Primary Care Association, and the American College of Emergency Physicians of California.

The measure would increase the 911 surcharge by 3 percent to 3.7 percent on telephone calls made within California. Although there have been no formal analyses of the initiative proposal, a California Medical Association newsletter notes that it would raise an estimated \$600 million to \$800 million annually. The measure would cap the cost of the surcharge for residential telephone customers at a maximum of 50 cents per month and exempt senior citizens and others who are on basic life-line rates. However, the cap on residential customers does not apply to mobile telephone services.

The measure would allocate the revenue as follows: 60% to emergency and trauma hospital services, 30.5% to emergency and trauma physician services, 5% to community clinics which provide urgent and primary care services, 3.75% to emergency and trauma first responders and paramedics, and 0.75% to the 911 emergency telephone systems. The funding for hospital, physician and clinic services would reimburse the costs of care rendered to uninsured and underinsured patients.

The Department of Health Services/Emergency Medical Services (DHS/EMS) indicates that this ballot initiative will help to address the emergency medical services crisis by: 1) increasing funding to overcrowded emergency departments to help them meet the growing demand for emergency care, 2) helping to fund community clinic care for the uninsured, which would provide some relief for emergency department overcrowding, 3) reimbursing emergency physicians and on-call specialists for uncompensated care, which will help to ensure that physicians continue to participate on call panels and provide emergency medical services, 4) providing funds to train more paramedics and equip Advanced Life Support units to ensure timely prehospital care to all parts of the County, and 5) helping the County-operated hospitals continue as the healthcare "safety net" by ensuring a steady funding stream for indigent and uninsured care. **Therefore, DHS recommends that the County support the State ballot initiative sponsored by the Coalition to Preserve Emergency Care, known as "the 911 Emergency and Trauma Care Act."**

Historically, the County has supported emergency medical and trauma care funding. For example, the County sponsored Measure B in 2002 which raised property taxes for emergency and trauma care, and SB 726 (Romero), which would provide the County with the authority to pursue a local alcohol tax for similar purposes. **However, because there is no existing County policy regarding increasing the telephone surtax to fund emergency medical services, support for this measure is a matter for Board policy determination.**

Support Ongoing State Appropriations for Emergency Medical Services

AB 1762, the budget trailer bill addressing health issues in the 2003-04 State Budget, included a \$25 million appropriation for distribution to physicians providing uncompensated

emergency services. The County supported this budget appropriation consistent with existing legislative policy to support proposals to provide permanent, stable funding for the County's public and private emergency and trauma care system. This policy was reaffirmed in the State Legislative Agenda for the second year of the 2003-04 State Legislative Session approved by the Board on December 16, 2003. Because this funding will help hospitals maintain current levels of trauma and emergency services by ensuring that physicians will continue to participate on call panels, **DHS recommends that the County support ongoing State appropriations for Emergency Medical Services, and we concur.**

Support Legislation to Develop and Expand Nursing Programs

The Department of Health Services/Emergency Medical Services indicates that expanding educational programs, developing innovative approaches to attract students to nursing, and supporting them through the program, will help to decrease the nationwide nursing shortage and ensure adequate nursing staff for the future.

Historically the County has supported a number of measures which were intended to increase the availability of nursing staff. For example, the County sponsored SB 885 (Polanco) in the FY 2001-02 Legislative Session seeking a \$3 million State appropriation for the Los Angeles County College of Nursing and Allied Health to expand the program and help to address the nursing shortage in California. However, SB 885 died in the Senate Education Committee without a hearing.

Consistent with existing County legislative policy to support State funding for the Los Angeles County College of Nursing and Allied Health, and enhanced funding for nursing education and training at public universities and teaching hospitals, **DHS recommends that the County support legislation to develop additional nursing programs and to expand existing programs to educate more nurses in the State of California, and we concur.**

DEJ:GK
MAL:JF:MS:hg/n

c: Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
County Counsel
Department of Health Services